

CHANGES TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please substitute the following marked up paragraphs for the paragraphs now appearing in the currently filed specification:

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 1, lines 1-13, as follows:

A The present application is a continuation of co-pending and commonly assigned Application Serial No. 09/106,997, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATICALLY PROVIDING SHIPPING/TRANSPORTATION FEES," filed June 29, 1998, now United States Patent No. 6,233,568, which itself is a continuation-in-part of Application Serial No. 08/796,275, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING DISPOSABLE ELECTRONIC POSTAGE," filed February 7, 1997, now United States Patent No. 5,774,886, which in turn is a continuation application of Application Serial No. 08/639,847, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR STORING POSTAGE IN A COMPUTER SYSTEM," filed April 19, 1996, now United States Patent No. 5,682,318, which is a continuation application of Application Serial No. 08/176,716, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUTOMATICALLY PRINTING POSTAGE ON MAIL," filed January 3, 1994, now United States Patent No. 5,510,992, the disclosures of all of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 25, lines 13-25, as follows:

A2 Referring to FIGURE 3A, there is illustrated a preferred embodiment of the E-STAMP registration form. The registration form includes information such as the portable processor button serial number 31, the E-STAMP serial number 32, the date and time that the E-STAMP program was installed 33, and user-specific information 35 (e.g., name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and identification number), and a copy of the License Agreement 38 having an identified location 308 for the user to sign. A preferred embodiment of the E-STAMP registration form will also contain all of the information needed to specifically identify the TMU button, E-STAMP program, and registered user in an encoded format, such as code 301 of FIG 3C. The encoded information 301 will preferably be in a machine-readable graphical security interface, such as a standard bar code. In the preferred embodiment, the code would be the PDF417 code discussed in more detail below.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 29, lines 5-18, as follows:

03 Alternatively, the value incrementing aspect of the present invention may be adapted so as to be fully or substantially automated and thus operate substantially free of operator input. In such an embodiment, a user's system 10 may be coupled, such as through modem 101 and PSN 102, to the POSTAGEMAKER program executing on a system 10 disposed in a secure environment, or otherwise adapted so as to prevent unauthorized access and/or interception and utilization of communicated information, such as through password protection, secure handshake, and/or encryption. Preferably, communication between such systems 10 to conduct refill and other transactions is accomplished utilizing fault tolerant techniques such as shown and described in the above referenced patent application, now United States patent number 6,199,055, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING FAULT TOLERANT TRANSACTIONS OVER AN UNSECURED COMMUNICATION CHANNEL," previously incorporated herein by reference.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 30, lines 17-23, as follows:

04 It shall be appreciated that communication between host system 10 and the coupled storage devices may be over an unsecured channel and may be subject to tampering, interception, and/or disruption. Accordingly, the preferred embodiment of the information exchange between these devices is as shown and described in the above referenced patent application, now United States patent number 6,199,055, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING FAULT TOLERANT TRANSACTIONS OVER AN UNSECURED COMMUNICATION CHANNEL."

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 30, line 24, through page 31, line 5, as follows:

05 With login successfully accomplished, the postal agent then must log into the POSTAGEMAKER system by plugging his/her agent portable processor button 49 18 into holder 17 and clicking on the function "Log in the Agent Button." The agent password is typed into the dialog window illustrated in FIGURE 4C. The password here will be passed to the agent security button for verification against the one stored inside of it. If the password is incorrect or the button was not the correct one for this agent an error will be displayed and the POSTAGEMAKER users will be prompted to retry the agent login operation.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 40, lines 3-9, as follows:

Q6 Step 5 - If the check of Step 4 is valid, the current meter balance is displayed in the center-button part of the E-STAMP program screen block 806, ~~just to the left of the traffic light icon which will also display "green" to indicate that a valid portable processor button is available for use in printing postage indicia. If any of the above checks are invalid, the traffic light displays "red" to indicate that a valid postage dispensing device was not detected.~~

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 41, lines 1-9, as follows:

Q7 Alternatively, the postage indicia and the addresses within boxes 803 and 805 may all be printed on a flyer, a pamphlet, a postcard or a sheet of paper. Whenever the indicia is printed on a letter, along with the addresses in boxes 803 and 805, that letter may be folded so that the indicia will show through an opening or window 901, in the top right hand corner of a specially designed envelope 900 illustrated in FIGURE 9 and as shown in co-pending Design Patent Applications Serial No. 29/022,913, filed May 16, 1994 now U.S. Patent No. D395,333, and Serial No. 29/039,328, filed May 24, 1995 no U.S. Patent No. D380,007, both incorporated by reference herein.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 41, lines 10-18, as follows:

Q8 Envelope 900 may be a standard or non-standard size with any number of windows as designed by the user. Typically, envelope 900 will have a first window 901 in the top right hand corner for the printed postage indicia to show through. Envelope 900 may also have other windows for the addressee's name and address (903) and for a return address (902) to show through. Envelope 900 may have glassine paper, or other transparent covering material, covering the described windows such that the postage indicia and other imprinted information is protected from inadvertent detachment and adverse conditions (such as inclement weather).

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 50, lines 3-13, as follows:

09 Assuming that the button was a postage type and the connection which was made in step 1019 is made and verified in step 1020 (generating an error at step 1013 if not valid connection signal), the POSTAGEMAKER software does not require the validated password of the postage button to continue and proceeds to step 1021. However, it will check that the proper authority level two has been previously granted by the presence of both a validated agent and master button on the bus at the same time in step 1021. If the proper authority level has not been attained, no operations may be performed on the postage button. If that authority exists, control can proceed to step 1022 or step 1018 in the case of a customer demand for new button initialization, old button credit refill or old, damaged button repair operations.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 50, line 14, through page 51, line 9, as follows:

010 The credit refill operation to a used button is depicted in FIGURE 10C, step 1030. The credit command must first verify, in step 1031, its authority level is correct and set at one by the presence of valid and password unlocked master and agent buttons or further postage refill processing is prevented (step 1031). If the proper authority level has not been attained, no operations may be performed on the postage button. Provided this is the case, in step 1032, the amount of postage to be credited to the button is input by the authorized agent into a form dialog window and validated for correctness by the POSTAGEMAKER software. In step 1033, the credit command, amount and a conglomeration of encrypted data known as a security packet are sent to the postage button which must decode and validate and if all appears to be valid, perform the credit operation before the time-out signified in step 1034 which will occur if the response does not come back from the button to the host system 10 in a specified period of time (generating an error at step 1035 if command response not okay or proceeding to step 1036 if command response is okay). It is the security packet that allows the button to continue with the credit operation. This data structure has a predefined layout and contents which are encrypted using a certain key and method of encryption. This security packet contains data items, such as identification numbers of master and agent issuing the credit to the button, host date/time (which must match not exactly but closely with internal button date/time), workstation number for host system 10 running the

Q10 POSTAGEMAKER software and postal authority location identification. Other data items could be used for checking purposes. This security packet is different in form and function from the one described here below in FIGURE 6.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 58, lines 1-5, as follows:

Q11 In step 1066, the positive or negative outcome is displayed on host system 10 display screen to the agent. The newly formatted agent button may now be removed from its holder and distributed to its new agent owner. Box 1067 ends the routine. ~~The internal~~ Internal layout 1301 of data in RAM for an agent (or master) button is depicted in FIGURE 13.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 66, lines 16-25, as follows:

Q12 Although described with reference to a preferred embodiment utilizing a portable memory device, it shall be understood that the present invention may operate without such a device. For example, a preferred embodiment of the present invention may communicate with a centralized storage device such as shown and described in the above referenced application, now United States patent number 5,822,739, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REMOTE POSTAGE METERING", previously incorporated herein by reference. Likewise, the postage credit may be stored within the host system such as shown and described in United States Patent No. 5,682,318, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR STORING POSTAGE IN A COMPUTER SYSTEM", incorporated herein by reference.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 63, lines 6-15, as follows:

Q13 In step 1403, the user has received back his/her button, now fully registered and therefore legal to use in postage transactions. The user inserts the storage device in its interface receptacle and invokes the system control program on the PC. Once a letter has been produced, with a certain amount of postage, this amount of postage is deducted from the amount stored in the portable processor (memory) by way of commands from E-STAMP. The postal indicia with its encrypted form of user information, postage amount, date, strike counter and other information is printed on a label for sticking to an envelope or actually printed on an envelope. At this point, the mail object is entered into the mail system of the shipping service provider in step ~~1401A~~ 1404A.

COMPLETE LISTING OF CLAIMS
IN ASCENDING ORDER WITH STATUS INDICATOR

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1. (Original) A method operable on a general multi-purpose processor-based system for authorizing a desired transaction to be conducted utilizing a particular provider, wherein information with respect to said desired transaction as conducted by each of a plurality of providers is presented for selection of said particular provider, said method comprising the steps of:
 - determining desired transaction parameters;
 - determining a value of said transaction associated with two or more of said plurality of providers utilizing ones of said transaction parameters;
 - presenting each of said determined values for comparison;
 - selecting said particular provider as a function of said comparison of said ones of said plurality of providers; and
 - printing authorization information acceptable by said particular provider in conducting said transaction.
 2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
 - coupling a storage device to said general multi-purpose processor-based system, wherein said storage device securely stores transaction authorization therein, wherein said transaction authorization is updated to reflect transactions authorized.
 3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said authorization information includes data from which said particular provider may verify prepayment of said transaction value.
 4. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein said authorization information includes a graphical security indicia.
 5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said transaction authorization comprises a common credit value register for two or more providers of said plurality of providers.
 6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said transaction authorization comprises a unique credit value register for each provider of said plurality of providers.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of determining desired transaction parameters includes the step of:

accepting information associated with said transaction parameters from a general purpose computer program operating on said general multi-purpose processor-based system.

8. (Currently Amended) ~~The method of claim 7,~~ A method operable on a general multi-purpose processor-based system for authorizing a desired transaction to be conducted utilizing a particular provider, wherein information with respect to said desired transaction as conducted by each of a plurality of providers is presented for selection of said particular provider, said method comprising the steps of:

determining desired transaction parameters, wherein the step of determining desired transaction parameters includes the step of accepting information associated with said transaction parameters from a general purpose computer program operating on said general multi-purpose processor-based system, wherein the general purpose computer program is selected from the group consisting of:

a word processor;
a database;
a spread sheet; and
an accounting system;

determining a value of said transaction associated with two or more of said plurality of providers utilizing ones of said transaction parameters;

presenting each of said determined values for comparison;

selecting said particular provider as a function of said comparison of said ones of said plurality of providers; and

printing authorization information acceptable by said particular provider in conducting said transaction.

9. (Original) A general multi-purpose processor-based system for authorizing a desired transaction to be conducted utilizing a particular provider, wherein information with respect to said desired transaction as conducted by each of a plurality of providers is presented for selection of said particular provider, said system comprising:

- means for determining parameters with respect to said desired transaction;
- means for determining a value of said transaction associated with two or more of said plurality of providers utilizing ones of said transaction parameters;
- means for presenting each of said determined values for comparison;
- means for selecting said particular provider as a function of said comparison of said ones of said plurality of providers; and
- means for generating authorization information acceptable by said particular provider in conducting said transaction, wherein said authorization information includes data from which said particular provider may verify prepayment of said transaction value.

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10. (Original) The system of claim 9, wherein said authorization information includes data from which said particular provider may collect payment of said transaction value.

11. (Original) The system of claim 9, further comprising:

- a storage device securely storing an amount of credit value therein;
- means for coupling said storage device to said general multi-purpose processor-based system, wherein said general multi-purpose processor-based system interacts with said storage device to retrieve a portion of said amount of credit value stored therein.

12. (Original) The system of claim 9, wherein said means for determining parameters comprises:

- means for accepting information associated with said transaction parameters from a general purpose computer program operating on said general multi-purpose processor-based system.

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